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SUBJECT: KEEPING THE MOMENTUM IN MAYSAN: KEY AREAS FOR
FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

[1](#)1. (U) This is PRT Maysan report.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Despite four years and over USD 200 Million of consent-winning projects in rural and urban Maysan, the province remains solidly allergic to any Coalition military activity. That said, the recent burst of engagement opens the door to several potentially valuable opportunities for PRT influence. Expectations are high for the GRS-supported surgical hospital in al-Amarah. There are excellent opportunities to provide both construction training and relief from a difficult housing shortage through the Governor's ambitious plan to build a city near the capital. There is also an opportunity to develop an academic center of excellence in energy studies through a dedicated energy department or institute in the local university. We plan to support both job creation and training through connecting Maysanis with available business development centers created by the USAID/Izdiyar program and with a vocational training center. There is also very positive scope to influence students through carefully targeted technical support of visible areas of Maysan University, as well as to facilitate a connection with American universities for a potential twinning relationship. End Comment.

The Flagship: A Surgical Hospital in al-Amarah

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Maysanis are looking forward to the planned construction of the Maysan Surgical Hospital, a very solid deliverable for al-Amarah. The Provincial Council (PC) has requested and received Ministry of Health approval for the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) Gulf Region South (GRS) to build a quality 100-bed facility in two phases for roughly USD 17 Million. Given that Maysan has only two hospitals for a province of roughly 800,000 people with low development indicators, this is a high-impact, high-visibility way to improve acute health care. We have heard our provincial interlocutors on local Arabic radio programs describing their plans to deliver this hospital for the benefit of the people of Maysan. This effort is a must-deliver.

Housing and Training: Infrastructure Planning Assistance

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Maysanis offered additional information about the Governor's long-term vision of building a planned city. Observing that al-Amarah suffers from poor urban planning and an overburdened infrastructure, they have emphasized the need to systematize the distribution of the population. To this end, they expressed a keen interest in having training in city planning at the technocrat/Director General (DG) staff-level, particularly in core services such as water, electricity, sewage, and waste disposal. They also welcomed any assistance that we can offer for training on project planning, from site selection and survey onward. They specifically noted a need for accurate mapping products.

15. (SBU) (Comment: We believe that for the Governor, this city vision is second only to developing Maysan's hydrocarbon upstream/downstream as a provincial priority. He sees the successful development of this city as the key to job creation, IDP resettlement, and pacifying the restive, unemployed youth that comprise the footsoldiers of the militias. The Governor's assistant told us that they see al-Majar al-Kabir as the main area of unemployment and insecurity in the province and the best opportunity for improvement. While we are helping coordinate Local Governance Program (LGP-RTI) assistance for city mapping, we believe that the Governor's vision offers an excellent opportunity to proactively and widely support the elected officials of Maysan in a well-considered (if ambitious) plan. Although they have not detailed the costs or their plans for funding the city project, it is clear that they have made some arrangement with Baghdad for the investment that will be required. We have seen digital photos of some of the heavy earthmoving equipment that the Governor purchased in Dubai. If successful, we believe that it could generate substantial numbers of unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled construction jobs, thereby indirectly weakening the appeal of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) membership and easing the housing stresses caused by large numbers of returnees from Iran and Sadr City. We warmly welcome creative ideas on how to deliver tangible training opportunities in support of this vision. End Comment.)

Iraq's Future Top Energy Institute in Maysan-Why Not?

16. (SBU) During a recent conference in Dubai, we noted Governor al-Maliki's deep and focused interest in developing

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the oil and gas potential in his province. Shell's Luay Jawad, Business Advisor for the Middle East, Caspian, and South Asia told us of his suggestion to the Governor that the province ask for assistance in establishing an energy institute in Maysan. Such an institute could be funded by international oil majors and, if well-organized, eventually produce the country's supply of petroleum and gas engineers, as well as technologists developing renewable energy solutions for rural application, using solar, wind, and biofuels. Such an institute need not only produce masters or undergraduate degrees, but could also include a shorter-term training track oriented at youth aiming for blue collar opportunities in the oil, gas, and renewables sectors.

17. (SBU) Although this would be a vanity project for the Governor, we do see practical value and a reaffirming connection with the university if it were established as a college. Given al-Maliki's (what we believe to be) admiration of the deep energy infrastructure investment in and good relations with Khuzestan, Iran's most oil-rich province on the other side of the border, we assess that he would strongly desire a legacy accomplishment such as this. We note that Iran's Petroleum University of Technology (www.put.ac.ir), has a college in Ahwaz, the Khuzestani capital. According to their website, the school generates a large number of internationally trained petroleum engineers and that all specialized classes are given in English (rather than in Farsi). Putting Maysan on the map with such a high profile center of national excellence would be another signature accomplishment for such a young and ambitious politician. The prestige and prospect of meaningful jobs across Iraq following training in such an institute could attract considerable interest among the youth and serve as another moderating influence. We would value any suggestions on how the Coalition might be able to support this, particularly technical training resources or related equipment.

Letting a Little Sun Shine In

¶18. (SBU) After the Governor expressed interest in solar energy resources, we drew from Department of Energy/National Renewable Energy Laboratory references and academic/ industry technical publications and prepared a linked listing of backgrounders, technical references, and component/system purchase resources. When they received this, we received a note graciously thanking us and adding that "really we feel very happy with our relationship with you and PRT". This small expression is symbolic of the dramatic turnaround we have seen in the relationship and the effectiveness of small gestures in this quirky relationship.

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs-Part 1: Small Business Help

¶19. (SBU) From recent meetings with USAID/ Izdihar officials, it is clear that a Southern Business Development Center (SBDC) as currently contemplated for an-Nasiriyah would be a boon to local provinces, including Maysan. Provincial officials were supportive of the idea of a women's craftmaking cooperative, but were cautious about the mechanics of setting up such a business. We expect that an SBDC that serves the local provinces with varying levels of business training via existing chambers of commerce or business associations would have excellent Maysani participation. We intend to nominate Maysanis for similar training at the established business development center in Erbil.

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs-Part 2: Vocational Training

¶10. (SBU) During recent meetings with the National VoTech Team, we learned that there is an opportunity for building a vocational technology training center in Maysan. We have raised this with provincial officials and the Governor has expressed his interest in having one. We believe the best prospect for this type of center in Maysan would be one tailored toward basic construction-related skills, given the province's ambitious plans for housing expansion and city construction.

Reaching Maysani Students: University Assistance

¶11. (SBU) Given the Maysanis' strong interest in boosting their university, we think that there is a special opportunity for subtle, targeted public diplomacy with Maysani youth. We believe that a high-visibility, well-designed and appointed student center or library (as

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requested by al-Rafaie) would be a popular amenity. A well-endowed university in the US may be interested in establishing such a connection, perhaps even linking students in the university's English college by videoteleconference with occasional classes in the US. We understand that many Maysan University students are relatively underprepared academically and pursue non-rigorous programs while waiting for job opportunities. We would welcome any suggestions on what might be possible to engage with them.

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